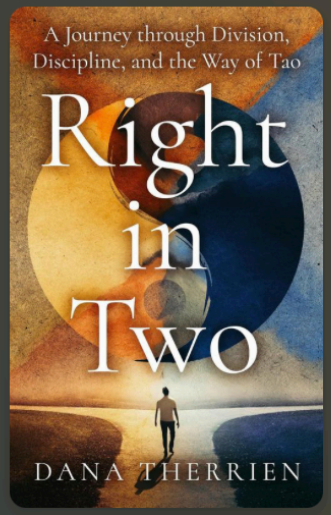

BIOGRAPHIES & MEMOIRS

Right in Two: A Journey Through Division, Discipline, and the Way of Tao

By Dana Therrien

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★★★★☆

A memoir that also serves as an introduction to Taoism, this debut work is full of heart and hard-won wisdom.

Review written by

CN **Christina Nifong**
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Raised poor in a Maine mill town, shaped by military service, and disappointed by the empty promises of the corporate ladder, Dana Therrien looks for meaning in a Boston-area Taoist temple. The philosophy, discipline, and leaders there seem to offer answers to questions Therrien has been weighing his whole life.

A memoir that also serves as an introduction to Taoism, this debut work is full of heart and hard-won wisdom. Therrien lands some lovely turns of phrase ("In New England, spring has a way of lingering like November, holding summer at bay beneath its gray weight"). And once the story settles, readers will be pulling for him. Can he stand strong or will he be dragged backwards by his demons?

Many will recognize themselves in Therrien: a perfectionist and striver, he has internalized the need to win at all costs. It is clearly costing him: healthy relationships with his family, promotions at work, inner peace, perhaps his future with his girlfriend. When Therrien enters the temple, it becomes a force that shapes every aspect of his life. The temple offers nightly martial arts classes, guided meditations, and group sessions teaching tenets of an ancient Asian religion. Eventually, Therrien proves his dedication and wins access to a life-changing mentor, a tough-on-the-outside Russian immigrant who demands absolute loyalty.

For the Tao-curious, *The Wisdom of Laotse* is the text quoted throughout the book, and Therrien's priest turns out to be one of the earliest adherents of Taoism in the US, Grand Master Alex Anatole.

Right in Two hits its stride around chapter 10, about halfway through the book, when Therrien begins to tell his story in a more linear style. Earlier chapters weave many timelines together, making the facts hard to follow.

But Therrien's message is clear-eyed throughout: The point, he writes, is "not to silence the opposition but to hold it. Yin and Yang, the tension that gives motion to life itself."

Ultimately, this story of one man's quest to discover his inner truth and align his life around what matters most — love, family, roots — is a satisfying and relatable read.

REVIEWED BY

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I review books for national platforms and on my website. I also profile authors and cultural happenings as a freelance writer. My focus topics are nonfiction essay collections and memoir; books about food and farming; as well as works in the wellness and travel sectors.